

## Natural England – Wildlife Management & Licensing Service

### Outline criteria for consideration of species reintroduction licence applications – DRAFT February 2009

Section 14(1) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence for any person to release or allow to escape into the wild any animal which;

- a) is of a kind which is not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state; or
- b) is included in Part I of Schedule 9.

Under section 16(4) of the Act licences can be issued to allow the release of animals that would otherwise be an offence under section 14. This licensing function is carried out by Natural England on behalf of the Secretary of State (Defra).

Applications for the release of former native species 'into the wild' in the wider countryside are considered, amongst other things, against the criteria in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Guidelines for Reintroductions – these can be found on their website:

[http://www.iucnsscrg.org/policy\\_guidelines.html](http://www.iucnsscrg.org/policy_guidelines.html) . Licences will normally only be issued if Natural England is satisfied that the release will not lead to significant negative impacts. If there are justified concerns about possible impacts, consideration may be given to allowing a limited 'trial' release (see below).

The main criteria that Natural England uses to assess such applications can be summarised as follows:

1. The release or reintroduction will have a neutral or beneficial impact on biodiversity and socio-economic interests.
2. In the case of reintroductions of formerly native species into the wider countryside;
  - a) an adequate assessment of the feasibility of the proposed release has been undertaken and the desirability and likely success of the project has been demonstrated,
  - b) the release will contribute to the conservation of the species concerned, or to the restoration of habitats or ecological function at the release site,
  - c) the release will not have a significant adverse impact on natural/semi-natural habitats, native wildlife or socio-economic interests,
  - d) proper consultation has taken place and a significant balance of public support in favour of the project has been demonstrated, and
  - e) appropriate practical measures are proposed to deal with unforeseen damage or problem individuals and an exit strategy is set out which, if necessary, can be implemented to terminate the project.
3. In all cases, a disease risk assessment has been carried out and no significant disease concerns have been identified.
4. In addition, consideration should be given to the impact of the project on the welfare of the individual animals involved.

## **Contingency planning**

A reintroduction/release project proposal will be expected to include specific provision for dealing with problem individuals. Proposals for mitigation measures should not place an undue burden of proof on a complainant and any body established by the project to assess complaints needs to be genuinely independent and give due weight to a complainant's interests.

A clear statement of an exit strategy is required in the project proposal and, in the case of projects involving a number of partners, all partners need to have 'signed up' to this before a licence can be issued.

An exit strategy is expected to include, for example:

- Broad stepwise criteria for moving from mitigation options, to removal of problem individuals, to termination of the project;
- Proposed constitution of an independent decision-making body for the above process;
- Summary of practical methods and techniques that will be used in event of removal/necessary implementation of exit strategy;
- Proposed provision of necessary equipment, facilities and resources; and
- Who will be responsible for implementation.

## **Trial Release**

Where a licence to release is being considered but concerns about potential impacts remain, the preferred option is for a trial release involving a relatively small number of individuals and limited potential for post-release dispersal. This will:

- Limit the absolute potential for negative impact;
- Limit the likely cost of mitigation;
- Provide an opportunity to monitor real impacts in the release area, and;
- Reduce the cost and maximise the chance of successfully implementing the exit strategy, should this prove necessary.

The number of individuals that can be released in a trial release will be determined by how easily the project could be terminated and animals recaptured/removed, if necessary. This will depend on the species' biology, mitigation methods, 'trapability' etc.

A trial release, as far as practicable, should be into an area where natural boundaries limit the species' dispersal potential and, where possible, should include provision for recapture/removal of individuals that stray beyond the trial area.

## **Monitoring**

All release projects should make provision for sufficient monitoring to determine the level of impacts arising from the project and any licensed 'trial period' should be of sufficient duration to allow conclusions to be drawn about such impacts before a decision is made on licensing any wider/larger-scale release programme.

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